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TAGS: [AE](#) [MU](#) [KG](#) [BA](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: ALTERNATIVES TO MANAS AIRBASE

Classified By: PM AA/S Frank J. Ruggiero, reasons 1.4(b),(d)

SUMMARY

1. (S) Department requests that all action addressees draw on the objectives and background below to assess the receptivity of the governments of Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to U.S. use of, respectively, Isa Air Base, al-Masirah, al-Thumrait (and potentially limited support at al-Salalah), and Safran Air Base. DoD is considering using these facilities to support aerial refueling or personnel and cargo transload missions in support of U.S., Allied and coalition military operations in Afghanistan. If the government is amenable, posts should request immediate permission from the host government for DoD to send technical assessment teams to these facilities and should communicate responses as soon as possible via front-channel cable to Washington. Washington agencies continue to deliberate whether to pursue similar options with the government of Azerbaijan, and, depending on the outcome of deliberations, may provide additional instructions separately for Baku. End summary.

OBJECTIVES

2. (S) Department instructs Embassy to pursue the following objectives:

-- Inform host government that although the Government of Kyrgyzstan (GoK) has formally notified the U.S. of its intent to terminate the access agreement, the U.S. is continuing discussions with the GoK with the goal of continuing operations from Manas, while simultaneously preparing for the possibility that we may have to shift our operations to other facilities in the region.

-- Inform host government that we have a shared interest in ensuring the success of the international effort to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan, along with a shared responsibility to support this effort actively and in concrete ways. The U.S. commends and is deeply appreciative of the host nations, robust support to U.S. forces and operations. However, the level of violence in Afghanistan continues to escalate and all members of the international community must do their part to try to reverse this trend.

-- Inform host government that the USG has done a preliminary assessment of facilities throughout the region and determined that (FOR MANAMA:) Isa Air Base, (FOR MUSCAT:) al-Masirah and al-Thumrait, (FOR ABU DHABI:) Safran Air Base may be well-suited to support the U.S., NATO and coalition aerial refueling or transloading missions that are currently being performed out of Manas.

-- Inquire whether host government is open to discussions

with the U.S. aimed at concluding the necessary agreements that would allow the U.S., our NATO Allies and coalition partners to operate military aircraft and stage military personnel at its respective facility.

-- Request host government's permission to send U.S. military personnel to appropriate facilities to conduct site surveys and airfield assessments as soon as possible, in an effort to gather the kind of detailed information that our military planners would need to determine how much time and resources it would take to set up the necessary infrastructure to support the proposed mission.

REPORTING DEADLINE:

13. (U) Please report host government responses by cable to both State (PM/RSAT), and DoD (OSD/ISA and OSD/APSA) as soon as possible, no later than April 1, 2009.

BACKGROUND:

14. (U) On February 20, 2009, the Government of Kyrgyzstan (GoK) notified the U.S. of its intent to terminate within 180 days the agreement that grants the U.S. access to Manas Air Base. On March 6, the Kyrgyz parliament approved terminating access to Manas for the eleven countries that have rights to use the base to support their participation in international operations in Afghanistan.

15. (U) Manas is important to the U.S., our Allies and our coalition partners, but it is not irreplaceable. The base serves as a staging and support point for aerial refueling tankers, and for U.S. troops, air crews, other personnel and cargo enroute to Afghanistan. U.S., Allied and coalition forces have used Manas since December 2001. In addition to about 1,000 U.S. personnel, there are about 65 Spanish and 35 French personnel stationed there now.

16. (U) Although the GoK has formally notified the U.S. of its intent to terminate the access agreement, the U.S. is continuing discussions with the GoK with the goal of continuing operations from Manas, while simultaneously preparing for the possibility that we may have to shift our operations to other facilities in the region.

17. (S) The U.S. intends to send an interagency team to Kyrgyzstan in early April to negotiate terms for continued U.S. access to Manas beyond August 19, 2009, when the 180 day notification period will expire and the U.S. will be expected to have departed Manas. While the U.S. intends to make a low-key, good-faith effort to secure continued access to Manas, the U.S. does not intend to engage in protracted negotiations with the GoK. With the likelihood of the U.S. succeeding in securing continued access to Manas uncertain, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is moving quickly to gain access to alternative facilities.

18. (S/REL BAH, UAE, OMAN) CENTCOM, with support from U.S. European Command (EUCOM), is looking for alternative facilities that could replicate the aerial refueling and personnel and cargo transload missions currently performed out of Manas. CENTCOM requires that the alternative facilities support these mission sets at initial operating capacity by May 21 and July 1, 2009, respectively. This accelerated timeline requires that DoD assessment teams be granted access to the facilities as soon as possible to conduct technical studies. CENTCOM intends to send site survey and airfield assessment teams immediately upon receiving host nation permission to evaluate the viability of the facilities listed above for their intended missions. CENTCOM will also look at the level of funding and infrastructure improvements that will be required, and from there will estimate the time that it will take to bring the facilities up to initial and full operating capacity.

19. (S/REL BAH, UAE, OMAN) The U.S. has done an initial

assessment of facilities throughout the region and determined that Isa Air Base in Bahrain may be suitable site from which to conduct the aerial refueling mission that is currently being performed out of Manas. Additionally, al-Masirah and al-Thumrait (and potentially al-Salalah) in Oman, and Safran Air Base in the UAE may be suitable replacement sites for the personnel and cargo transload mission that is currently being performed out of Manas. In conducting this assessment, the U.S. considered a number of factors, such as the facilities, distance from Afghanistan, their physical capacity and supporting infrastructure, the nature of the U.S. relationship with the host nations and the level of host nation commitment to the effort in Afghanistan.

¶10. (S/REL BAH, UAE, OMAN) The U.S. will seek the host governments, permission to send U.S. military personnel to their respective facilities to conduct site surveys and airfield assessments as soon as possible, in an effort to gather the kind of detailed information that U.S. military planners would need to determine how much time and resources it would take to set up the necessary infrastructure to support an aerial refueling mission at Isa Air Base in Bahrain, and the personnel and cargo transload mission at al-Masirah and al-Thumrait in Oman, and Safran Air Base in the UAE.

¶11. (S/REL BAH) Preliminary estimates of Isa Air Base from CENTCOM indicate that the U.S. would require runway and ramp space for between 10 to 15 KC-135 aircraft and possibly two large cargo aircraft (e.g., C-17 or C-5), as well as the presence of approximately an additional 1,000 U.S. military personnel in Bahrain.

¶12. (S/REL OMAN) Preliminary estimates of al-Thumrait and al-Masirah from CENTCOM indicate that the U.S. would require substantial additional investment and acceleration of runway repairs at al-Thumrait and al-Masirah, along with other infrastructure investments to be determined by the site survey team.

¶13. (S/REL UAE) Preliminary estimates of Safran Air Base from CENTCOM, indicate that the U.S. would face strict limits on fuel allocation from the host nation. Other hurdles or necessary investments would be determined by the site survey team.

¶14. (S) (FOR BAKU) Washington agencies continue to assess the merits of Heydar Aliyev International Airport, Azerbaijan as an alternative site for the tanker operations and, depending upon the result of ongoing deliberations, may provide additional instructions. No action is required at this time.

(U) POINT OF CONTACT

¶15. Please contact PM/RSAT - John Schwenk at (202) 647-2558, schwenkja@state.sgov.gov for further information. Please Cc OSD - Peter Jeydel, at 703-697-1434, peter.jeydel@osd.smil.mil.

CLINTON